



Harriet Van Horne

CLIMATE OF FEAR

It's better to trust the world and be deceived than to doubt one man's word.

And it's better to smile through life, believing and accepting, than to skulk about with a mean, suspicious mind.

Two noble precepts, those, now outdated by the fear and cynicism of our time. It hurts to see trust vanish from our society. For with it goes a gentleness, a faith that sweetened the very air and raised us all a little above ourselves. This loss of trust goes far in explaining the oft-heard remark, "We used to be *nicer* people." We were, we were. Because the world was nicer.

To have watched the erosion of trust, over the past 20 years, is to have witnessed a dramatic change in the face of America. Our civilization is not yet what Ezra Pound once said it was—"An old bitch gone bad in the teeth"—but the candor, the openness, have vanished.

One feels sadness for the rising generation that cannot imagine a time when front doors were left off the latch all night. When bicycles were parked casually under the trees. When we walked home in the late night feeling calm and easy, eyes on the stars.

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The fear now darkening the land has chilled the quality Americans always were renowned for—warmth. Fear has created a ghetto of the spirit, a private place where we huddle with our own kind and talk of prisons and crime, of John Mitchell and Spiro Agnew and the Old Pretender at the FBI.

Perhaps the most troubling element in the climate of fear is the growing suspicion we have of our own government.

When ordinary men assume great powers and use them in secret, we are right to fear. When peaceful citizens are spied upon by paid informers, when telephones are tapped and meeting rooms are bugged, we are living in a police state. The most basic right in a democratic society—the right to be alone—is violated all over America every single day. We are right to be fearful. And considering the kind of country we are becoming, we are also right to be angry and ashamed.

One of my bedside companions is Montaigne. And one sleepless night last week I came upon this:

"The corruption of our age is made up of the individual contributions of each of us. Those who are influential enough to do so contribute injustice, cruelty, avarice and tyranny. The weaker sort . . . contribute folly, futilities and idleness."

Like most of us today, Montaigne wishes that the men in the seats of power were wiser and finer than they are. "They are much beneath us if they are not far above us," he writes. "Having promised more, they must do more."

If one were to single out the agencies that have done most to sow fear, suspicion and distrust among our citizens these would come first: the FBI, the Justice Department as directed by John Mitchell and the CIA. One might also mention the U. S. Army and the paranoid propaganda mill of the Far Right, with its hundreds of hours on regional radio and TV each week, hawking hatred, misinforming the simple, setting citizen against citizen.

Lack of trust in our leadership has led to another significant change in the American attitude. That is, an open disrespect for the men in power. This trend was first ap-

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parent in the Johnson Administration. A great many Americans had viewed President Roosevelt with a blind hate but the hate was private, an understanding among friends, so to speak. There was no dramatic equivalent of "MacBird," with the President portrayed as a murderer. There was no film documentary on the order of "Millhouse" which is totally contemptuous of Mr. Nixon.

When Philip Roth, in his new novel "Our Gang," writes about Trick E. Dixon and J. Edgar Hee-Haw, we may find the humor juvenile but we are no longer shocked. A lot of moonbeams have been fanned from our eyes in recent years.

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A new book, "Kennedy Justice," states, in specific detail, certain lies J. Edgar Hoover and his men told Robert Kennedy while he was attorney general. Richard Harris' book "Justice" exposed the chicanery and ineptitude of John Mitchell. And a recent biography of Richard Nixon calls him "the least authentic man alive."

A disenchanted CIA spy who came in from the cold after 16 years, recently told an interviewer that our intelligence apparatus was "amoral."

"They are not immoral," Victor Marchetti stressed, "they are amoral."

Not content with stirring up wars in other countries, the CIA is now turning its attention to groups in this country they regard as "subversive," the ex-spy said.

Besides their paramilitary activities in Indochina (a \$450 million a year operation), Marchetti said the CIA had a secret depot in the Midwest—"where they have all kinds of unmarked weapons."

An "extremely reactionary President," said Marchetti, "could order the CIA's clandestine activities to go beyond mere infiltration." Just what kind of President, one wonders, does Mr. Marchetti fancy we've got now?